

Opinion

The county's
favourite
writer

Richard

Community comes together for the environment

Volunteers across the county are heeding the call of the NHS to get out into countryside and take nature's green pills available free with fresh air and exercise.

Last week I gave a lecture on where to go and what to see in Sussex to yet another group that has sprung up: Mid Arun Valley Environmental Survey (www.maves.org.uk). This is a community-based charity whose purpose is environmental protection and improvement within the beautiful landscape to the south and west of Arundel. Apparently I raised £150 as a starter for funding surveys of wildlife in those woods and fields at the heart of West Sussex.

Of course this is peanuts compared to the budgets of other local voluntary wildlife groups such as RSPB, Sussex Wildlife Trust, or Manhood Wildlife Heritage. (I have mentioned MWF in this column before: they look after the water voles amongst a host of other wildlife on the Selsey Peninsula.)

After my talk to MAVES in Walberton village hall the chairperson informed us that dormice, purple emperor butterflies, jack snipe, and bluebell woods are among the wildlife treasures to be found in their patch. There are also historic trees and vital flyways for migrating wildfowl and passerines such as wheatear, ring ouzel and whinchat.

What they want to do is to collect long-term data on as many species as possible in order to make this available to farmers, foresters, landowners, local communities, and for educational projects with schools and universities. The Western Arun and Rother countryside to the north is an oasis of rich and tranquil habitats and it needs to be kept like that. The proposed Arun bypass threatens the whole of this unique



Sussex treasure known as Binsted and Tortington Woods (see this week's walk).

In 1889 my grandfather Charles Hibbert came to live in Walberton House and his daily diary which I still have, records all the wildlife that he saw then, 126 years ago. He saw a dozen corncrakes for example. He also saw scores of snipe and some jack snipe feeding in the meadow ditches and rifes. He recorded flocks of lapwings and golden plover, and also some kingfishers and grey wagtails.

In Binsted Woods he found several cuckoos, and turtle doves were very common. He saw purple emperor and silver-washed fritillary butterflies, and 15 species of snails, those mainly of interest being in the deep ponds around Walberton Park. They are still there today. Of great interest was that he found the very rare fresh-water cockle in Binsted Brook.

This is a mollusc about the size of a grape pip. MAVES are to look for that as well as for the rest of the species of our precious fauna and flora that still live in the woods and fields to the west of Arundel. We await their findings with great interest.

The woodcock

Just one of the birds that require